

Administrators' Sense of Self-efficacy in Supervision of Teachers of English as a Second Language

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English language learners (ELLs) are the fastest growing segment of the U.S. school population, which means schools are hiring significant numbers of new ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers. This burgeoning pool of ESL teachers must be supervised by administrative staff, and the stakes are considerably higher now that teacher-evaluation policies frequently require teachers to make the grade or lose their jobs. But most administrators' educational experiences are remote from ESL instruction; few administrators are former ESL teachers, and supervisory training routinely fails to encompass ESL pedagogy. Hence, it remains unclear whether the administrators who supervise ESL teachers feel competent to do so. It seems plausible that the increasing ESL population is causing a supervision problem in modern schools: more and more ESL teachers whom administrators feel unprepared to supervise. To test this theory, a study was conducted focused on administrators' self-efficacy beliefs in supervision of ESL teachers. We designed a new survey instrument and evaluated its psychometric characteristics with a sample of 75 administrators, with linear regression performed to explore factors that predict administrators' self-efficacy beliefs in ESL teacher supervision. Results indicate that the more ESL teachers an administrator supervises, the lower the self-efficacy the administrator reports in supervising these teachers. So the increasing quantity of ESL teachers is in fact producing a growing problem in schools, indicating an urgent need for more extensive and higher-quality training for administrators in the objectives and methods of ESL instruction.

Widely considered the fastest growing segment among school age children (Center for Public Education, 2011), the number of English language learners (ELLs) in U.S. schools increased by about two million between 1997 and 2003 (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The ELL population had already nearly doubled in size in the last two decades of the 20th century, and recent estimates now put their numbers at more than five million (Batalovea, Fix, & Murray, 2005). Put differently, this group increased by about 105 percent during a period when the general school population grew by only 12 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). As such, the needs of this population are clearly now a major issue in many U.S. schools and for the nation's public education system as a whole.

Meeting the needs of this growing population has prompted schools to hire increasing numbers of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers – professionals trained and certified in (ESL) instruction. These teachers are typically supervised by school principals – the administrators charged to oversee all the teachers in their buildings. The increasing numbers of ESL teachers in schools results in significantly more ESL teacher supervision for principals. Moreover, the stakes have become considerably higher in recent years, as teacher-evaluation policies increasingly require teachers to meet performance standards (as reflected in their supervisors' assessments) to keep their jobs.

But most administrators' educational experiences are remote from ESL instruction (Hunt, 2008; Shumate, Munoz, & Winter, 2005). Few administrators are former ESL teachers, and

supervisory training routinely fails to encompass ESL pedagogy. Hence, it remains unclear whether the administrators who supervise ESL teachers feel competent to do so. It seems plausible that the increasing population of ESL students (Curtin, 2005; National Center for Education Statistics, 2012) is causing a supervision problem in modern schools: more and more ESL teachers whom administrators feel unprepared to supervise.

Literature Review

Supervision: The Role of the Administrator

A primary role for principals is the supervision of teaching staff (Glickman, 2002). On the whole, teachers concur that there is a strong need for coaching and instructional support from principals (Milanowski, 2006). This type of support is especially vital for teachers who are new to the profession, as they rely heavily on principals for feedback on their lessons (Oliva, Mathers & Liane, 2009). But what factors impact the ability of principals to provide effective supervision and performance feedback? Kerrins and Cushing (2000) compared observational feedback provided by beginning and experienced principals. Both groups viewed the same segment of a seventh grade mathematics class twice. Following the first viewing, the participants were questioned about instruction, classroom management, and their recommendations for improvement. They were asked similar questions after the second viewing. The results highlighted different findings between the two groups in their ability to evaluate and make recommendations for instructional progress. While the experienced principals were able to view the big picture, putting all the lesson components together to form meaning and coherence, the novice principals attempted to understand each segment of the lesson without drawing direct connections to what was needed in order to make meaning for the students. This finding points up the fact that not all principals are equal in their abilities, and there may be factors (such as experience) that impact their ability to effectively supervise teachers.

In addition to experience, specialized knowledge may affect principals' ability to supervise teachers. The lack of such knowledge has long been considered problematic. Darling-Hammond (1986) stated there was not typically enough capacity in the evaluation system to assess observed teaching behaviors, since the evaluator is often not an expert in the content area in which the teacher is being evaluated. Indeed, if the purpose of teacher evaluation is to uncover instructional strengths and weaknesses to enable teachers to improve their work (Oliva et al., 2009), then it is vital for evaluators to possess instructional knowledge. Olsen (2010), for example, found that the principals who were the most successful at supervising teachers were those who possessed a deep understanding of the material being presented in class. Accordingly, teachers surveyed to explore their perceptions of the principal's role in professional evaluation indicated that they benefitted from discourse with a principal who was both knowledgeable and experienced (Zimmerman & Deckert-Pelton, 2003).

Administrator Self-Efficacy in Teacher Supervision

Research supports the view that principals must be confident in their own abilities as supervisors if they are to effectively foster high-level performance from their teaching staffs (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Lyons & Murphy, 1994). More generally, the construct known as *self-efficacy* has been identified as key to leadership success (Bandura, 1997; Daly, Der-Martirosian, Ong-Dean, Park, & Wishard-Guerra, 2011; McCormick, 2010). Self-efficacy can be described as the sense of confidence (or lack thereof) that individuals experience when performing a given task. Self-efficacy can have a considerable impact on performance; put simply, people who have strong self-efficacy when carrying out a task (i.e., they believe that they will do well)

tend to perform at a higher level relative to those who believe that they will perform less impressively (Ajzen, 2002; Daly et al., 2011; Devos, Bouckennooghe, Engels, Hotton, & Aelterman, 2006; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; McCollum, & Kajs, 2009; McCullers & Bozeman, 2010). Self-efficacy beliefs also influence how much effort will be expended on a given task and how much time a person will persist in this effort when faced with difficulties or failure (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Fisher, 2011).

Leaders in many fields are today understood first and foremost as change agents, and it is therefore important to note that self-efficacy has been described as a judgment regarding one's ability to promote change (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). This perspective is often expressed with reference to Albert Bandura's (1991) social cognitive theory of self-regulation. Bandura argues, "Whether negative discrepancies between personal standards and attainments are motivating or discouraging is partly determined by people's beliefs that they can attain the goals they set for themselves" (1991, p. 258). Bandura further asserts that when people believe they are able to control the environment of their everyday lives, they are more likely to extend the effects of their personal efficacy, which increases the likelihood of success (Bandura, 1997). This seems to be something of which school leaders should be aware, since administrators' sense of self-efficacy can translate into effective classroom observations, which can result in more effective practices among the teachers whom they supervise.

A number of studies demonstrate the impact of administrator self-efficacy. Daly et al. (2011) surveyed principals in 594 schools in California and found that self-efficacy scores were higher for principals whose schools were not classified as in need of improvement. According to the authors, administrators with a lower sense of self-efficacy may more easily see themselves as failures and consequently may be more likely to employ coercive strategies to effect change in classroom practice, rather than making modifications based on an understanding of students' instructional needs. Devos et al. (2006) assessed the well-being of 46 Flemish elementary school principals, who completed questionnaires and participated in audiotaped interviews. The results showed self-efficacy to be correlated with job satisfaction and suggested that principals who were less confident in their own abilities viewed problematic situations as threats rather than as challenges and opportunities for change. Similarly, a survey administered to 312 principals by McCollum and Kajs (2009) yielded data that showed a significant relationship between self-efficacy and goal orientation, wherein administrators with higher self-efficacy were more likely to establish productive instructional goals. Finally, Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2004) found that principals with higher self-efficacy were, when observing teachers, more likely to (a) look for deep understanding of the subject matter at hand, (b) welcome new ideas that promote effective teaching, and (c) establish challenging instructional objectives for themselves and their teachers.

Research Questions

The forgoing literature review suggests that administrators' sense of self-efficacy is a key component of effective teacher supervision. But it remains unclear whether administrators feel competent to supervise the increasing number of ESL teachers in schools, since they typically have educational backgrounds far removed from ESL curriculum and instruction (Hunt, 2008; Shumate, Munoz, & Winter, 2005). What factors impact administrator self-efficacy in the supervision of ESL teachers? To what extent is the burgeoning ELL population causing a supervision problem in modern schools, because of increasing numbers of ESL teachers whom administrators may feel unprepared to supervise?

Method

Participants and Procedures

To explore the relationship between administrators' sense of self-efficacy in the supervision of ESL teachers and a set of predictor variables, a survey was sent by mail (along with stamped return envelopes) to 150 randomly selected principals in a large metropolitan area in the northeastern United States. The survey collected demographic data regarding the participants and also asked for their opinions (expressed as their level of agreement with a series of statements, as detailed in Figure 1). Participants received instructions indicating that there were no right or wrong answers and that their identities would be kept confidential.

Of the 150 surveys sent, 82 were returned, yielding a response rate of 54%. However, seven responses were excluded due to incomplete data, yielding a sample of 75. This sample included 27 males (36%) and 48 females (64%). The participants averaged 47.63 years of age ($SD=8.58$), with 11.46 average years as full-time teachers ($SD=6.38$) and 10.36 average years as full-time administrators ($SD=6.7$). As for subjects in which they were certified to teach, 39 of the participants (52%) were accredited in elementary education. Seven participants (9.3%) held Master's degrees only, 25 (33.3%) had Master's degrees plus 30 credits, 30 (40%) had Master's degrees plus 60 credits, and 13 (17.3%) held doctoral degrees. The participating principals supervised an average of 4.66 ($SD=5.0$) ESL teachers in their schools.

Development of Survey Instrument

Data collection involved the development of a survey instrument designed specifically by the researchers for this study. The survey included 22 items created to assess this study's dependent variable (Figure 1). These items were constructed to encompass a range of topics that might plausibly be indicative of administrators' sense of self-efficacy in supervising ESL teachers (e.g., "I feel comfortable conducting pre- and post-observation conferences with ESL teachers"). To minimize response bias, six items were worded for reverse scoring (e.g., "My capacity to evaluate ESL teachers is lackluster compared to my capacity to evaluate teachers of other subjects"); these items were re-reversed when the data were analyzed. Also to reduce the effect of response bias, seven distractor items were included (e.g., "I believe ESL teachers should work with small groups of students rather than in whole class settings"). These distractors were excluded from data analysis. Data reduction procedures performed on these 22 items are reported below.

The survey instrument also collected data on the study's independent variables, seven personal/supervision characteristics that could reasonably be expected to be significantly associated with administrators' sense of self-efficacy in supervising ESL teachers. These included age, gender, years as a full-time teacher, subjects in which the administrator is certified to teach, years as a full-time school administrator, educational attainment, and estimated number of ESL teachers supervised annually.

Results

Data analysis was performed using SPSS (version 19). First, data reduction procedures (factor analysis and internal-consistency reliability analysis) were performed to select the best-performing items for assessing the dependent variable, participants' sense of efficacy in supervision of ESL teachers. Second, multiple regression procedures were performed to examine the extent to which the seven independent variables predicted the dependent variable.

To select the subset of best-performing items for tapping the dependent variable, a series of exploratory factor-analytic models using the principal-components method were conducted.

Factor extraction was based on examination of the scree plot, the eigenvalue-greater-than-one rule, and a parallel analysis. A Keyser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling adequacy (KMO) of .90 indicated that the sample was suitable for factoring. Results of Bartlett's test of sphericity also were satisfactory ($p < .01$).

Several factor-analytic models were evaluated, resulting in a six-item, one-factor model selected for its favorable psychometric characteristics (Figure 2). The single factor accounted for 68.2% of the variance in the participants' responses. This factor yielded an eigenvalue of 4.1; the next largest eigenvalue was .53, clearly indicating the dominance of the single factor. The six items were satisfactorily associated with the factor, producing pattern/structure coefficients (loadings) ranging from .77 to .87 and averaging .82. The six-item, one-factor model produced satisfactory internal consistency reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .91. The six selected items included no reversed items.

In the regression analysis, factor scores from the selected items were entered as the outcome variable, with the seven independent variables entered as predictors (Table 1). Examination of the stem-and-leaf display of the dependent variable indicated a normal distribution with a slight positive skew. The model produced an R-square of .10 and satisfactory homoscedasticity. Low variance-inflation (VIF) scores indicated no problems of multicollinearity.

Only one of the seven independent variables was significantly associated with the dependent variable: estimated number of ESL teachers supervised annually ($t = -2.21, p < .05$). This variable produced a standardized coefficient (beta) value of $-.256$, indicating that a higher estimated number of ESL teachers supervised was associated with lower factor scores. In other words, the more ESL teachers an administrator supervised, the less confident he or she appears to have felt about evaluating these teachers.

Discussion

In this study, the only variable that significantly predicted administrators' sense of self-efficacy in supervising ESL teachers was not one that had to do with demographic differences (e.g., age, teaching experience, administrative experience, educational attainment). Rather, the significant predictor involved differences in administrators' supervisory situations: the number of ESL teachers supervised. A greater workload of ESL teachers to supervise apparently prompted administrators to feel less capable of supervising these teachers. In other words, low self-efficacy in supervising ESL teachers was felt more acutely by supervisors who were responsible for larger numbers of ESL teachers.

In turn, this pattern of low administrator self-efficacy likely negatively impacts the quality of ESL teacher supervision in schools, based on evidence that low self-efficacy is associated with diminished supervisory performance in other domains (Ajzen, 2002; Daly et al., 2011; Devos, Bouckennooghe, Engels, Hotton, & Aelterman, 2006; Gist & Mitchell, 1992; McCollum, & Kajs, 2009; McCullers & Bozeman, 2010). Hence, the hypothesis with which this study began was supported: the increasing ESL teacher workforce is creating a growing supervisory problem in schools. And this situation seems likely to worsen as the number of ESL teachers continues to expand in response to the growing population of ELLs in schools.

Unfortunately, this is a problem that ultimately affects student learning. Weak supervision reduces the effectiveness of ESL instruction, which ultimately results in diminished student achievement. But the opposite is also true: overcoming this deficiency would have a positive impact on ESL teacher supervision, which would benefit ESL instruction, leading to the improved educational outcomes for English Language Learners.

These results suggest a pressing need for more extensive and higher-quality training for school administrators in the nature and methods of ESL teaching. To assist practicing administrators, school districts might well survey their administrators to determine which areas of ESL curriculum

and instruction are most in need of enhancement or clarification. Based on the results, in-service professional development programs for school administrators could be developed that target these learning needs. To set such an initiative in motion, districts could turn to a variety of resources, including ESL specialists already working within the district, commercial training vendors from outside the district, and/or colleges or universities with ESL expertise.

Similarly, steps might well be taken to improve programs that prepare school administrators. These programs should strengthen their efforts to prepare administrators with needed expertise in ESL curriculum and instruction. At present, this preparation is sorely lacking, in many cases – producing the less-than-encouraging results of this study. Making these improvements might well include closer collaboration between faculty in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESOL) and faculty who specialize in training school administrators.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study's survey response rate of 54% was not as robust as desired, and a stronger response might have generated different results. Additionally, the participants were drawn from a large, predominantly urban area, which limits generalizability to other geographic areas and to less densely populated regions. Broadly speaking, however, the principals who responded to the survey are likely to have a great deal in common with principals elsewhere, and the findings thus have at least some relevance in other contexts. Nonetheless, future research should be attempted using larger, more geographically diverse samples, and encompassing urban, suburban, and rural areas, in order to more effectively represent the population of school administrators.

As for additional future research, it would be useful to develop an international database of the specific areas of ESL curriculum and instruction, and ESL supervision, in which principals most require training in order to effectively evaluate and support their teachers. Moreover, studies could be conducted to compare principals' sense of self-efficacy in the supervision of teachers across the various models used to support ELLs, such as ESL in the content areas, Bilingual Education, and Dual Language programs. Initiatives as such will generate evidence indicating the content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge that administrators most require, and of the ways in which they respond to various supervisory situations. This evidence would enhance efforts to provide administrators with effective, research-based support, helping them to evaluate and support the teaching of today's linguistically diverse student populations.

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Figure 1: Opinion Survey

1. Age: _____
2. Gender: (*check one*) ☐ Male ☐ Female
3. Years as a full-time classroom teacher: _____
4. Subject(s) you are certified to teach: (*check one*)
☐ elementary education ☐ languages other than English (LOTE)
☐ math ☐ art, music, drama, or dance
☐ science ☐ health or physical education
☐ English ☐ business
☐ social studies ☐ ESL
☐ other (please specify.....)
5. Years as a full-time administrator: _____
6. Educational attainment: (*check one*) ☐ Master's ☐ Master's + 30 ☐ Masters + 60
☐ Doctorate
7. Estimated number of ESL teachers you supervise this school year _____

Please give your personal opinion about each statement below by circling the appropriate number to the right of each statement. This is an opinion questionnaire – there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. Your answers will remain confidential.

Key: 1 = strongly agree 4 = disagree slightly more than agree
 2 = moderately agree 5 = moderately disagree
 3 = agree slightly more than disagree 6 = strongly disagree

1. I understand the work that ESL teachers do.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	agree				disagree	
2. I think ESL self-contained classes are the way to go, rather than disperse ESL students throughout classes with non-ESL students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	agree				disagree	
3. My capacity to evaluate ESL teachers is lackluster compared to my capacity to evaluate teachers of other subjects.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	agree				disagree	
4. I possess the knowledge and skills needed to evaluate ESL teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	agree				disagree	
5. I think principals should have additional training in ESL supervision, to sharpen their focus when observing ESL teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	agree				disagree	
6. My evaluations of ESL teachers are as instructionally focused as those I have completed for teachers of other subjects.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	agree				disagree	
7. I don't know ESL well enough to evaluate ESL teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	agree				disagree	
8. I believe ESL teachers should work with small groups of students rather than in whole class settings.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	agree				disagree	
9. I feel comfortable conducting pre- and post-observation conferences with ESL teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	agree				disagree	
10. It is unfair to require ESL students to take standardized tests after learning English for two years or less.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	agree				disagree	
11. My evaluations of ESL teachers deserve low-to-middling marks.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	agree				disagree	
12. I am sufficiently prepared to write recommendations for ESL teachers after observing their lessons.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	agree				disagree	

13. I find “push-in” ESL instruction to be more effective than “pull out.”	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>agree</i>				<i>disagree</i>	
14. I just don’t know the curriculum in ESL.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>agree</i>				<i>disagree</i>	
15. I have a good idea about how ESL teachers' work ought to be assessed.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>agree</i>				<i>disagree</i>	
16. I believe ESL students ought to receive more intensive support than non-ESL students, because learning English is so important to students’ futures.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>agree</i>				<i>disagree</i>	
17. I know what to look for in an ESL lesson.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>agree</i>				<i>disagree</i>	
18. I lack the detailed understanding of ESL needed to be able to evaluate ESL teachers' work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>agree</i>				<i>disagree</i>	
19. I understand the ESL curriculum, which helps inform my work in evaluating ESL teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>agree</i>				<i>disagree</i>	
20. Efforts should be made to improve the subject-matter knowledge of ESL teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>agree</i>				<i>disagree</i>	
21. I find evaluating ESL teachers difficult to do.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>agree</i>				<i>disagree</i>	
22. I am able to offer concrete advice for ESL teachers to help improve their instruction.	1	2	3	4	5	6
	<i>agree</i>				<i>disagree</i>	

Notes: Reversed items: 3, 7, 11, 14, 18, 21. Distractors: 2, 5, 8, 10, 13, 16, 20.

Figure 2: Items Selected for Assessment Model

I am able to offer concrete advice for ESL teachers to help improve their instruction

I understand the ESL curriculum, which helps inform my work in evaluating esl teachers

I know what to look for in an ESL lesson

I have a good idea about how ESL teachers' work ought to be assessed

I am sufficiently prepared to write recommendations for ESL teachers after observing their lessons

I feel comfortable conducting pre and post observation conferences with ESL teachers

Table 1: Regression Results

Independent Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-.245	.884		-.278	.782
Age	.019	.020	.167	.940	.350
Gender	.016	.248	.008	.065	.948
Years as a full time teacher	-.005	.021	-.035	-.244	.808
Subjects certified to teach	.056	.039	.175	1.427	.158
Years as a full time administrator	-.019	.021	-.129	-.896	.373
Educational attainment	-.139	.137	-.116	-1.013	.315
Estimated number of ESL teachers supervised this school year	-.052	.023	-.256	-2.205	.031

Dependent Variable: Factor scores from six item, one factor model interpreted as assessing administrators' sense of self efficacy in supervision of ESL teachers